DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 050 211 UD 011 502

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TITLE The Development of an Academic Support System for Educationally Disadvantaged Students.
PUB DATE Apr 71
NOTE 11p.; Paper presented to American Personnel and Guidance Association, 20th Annual Convention, Atlantic City, N.J., April 4-8, 1971

EDRS PRICE EDRS Price MF-$0.65 HC-$3.29
DESCRIPTORS College Admission, *College Programs, *Disadvantaged Youth, Dropout Prevention, *Educationally Disadvantaged, *Group Counseling
IDENTIFIERS Park Achievement Seminar

ABSTRACT

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ED050211

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# THE DEVELOPMENT OF AN ACADEMIC SUPPORT SYSTEM FOR EDUCATIONALLY DISADVANTAGED STUDENTS

A PRESENTATION TO

AMERICAN PERSONNEL AND GUIDANCE ASSOCIATION

APRIL 5, 1971

BY

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UD011502

THE DEVELOPMENT OF

TITLE: AN ACADEMIC SUPPORT SYSTEM FOR EDUCATIONALLY DISADVANTAGED STUDENTS

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ABSTRACT: Each year approximately 400,000 students are academically suspended from college. While these students are being processed out, another group is being admitted, a large portion of which is destined to fail for reasons other than the lack of academic ability.

Concern for helping students in academic trouble has been expressed in the development of many different programs. Study skill classes, orientation programs, reading clinics, remedial English and math programs are but a few. Many times well-intended, carefully planned and often competently staffed programs offer only limited assistance to the floundering student.

This paper describes an academic support program, developed and implemented at a liberal arts college, that has had a significant effect upon the retention of "high risk" students. Germane to its success and discussed in detail is the Educational Diagnosis. Only after the accurate identification of academic barriers can a constructive rehabilitation program be assigned. Emphasis, as described in the model, is placed upon the development of basic skills in reading, writing, speaking, listening and critical thinking. Group counseling centers on the student's level of expectations, self-concept, attitude toward work and the college process.

The topic of this session is the Development of an Academic Support System for Educationally Disadvantaged Students. Before I go on I think that I should define what I mean when I use the term Educationally Disadvantaged. We have all heard these words and I'm sure they have a variety of meanings.

As far as I'm concerned, Educationally Disadvantaged refers to the student who is unable to make satisfactory academic progress because of ABILITY, PREPARATION, PSYCHOLOGICAL FACTORS, or CULTURAL DEPREVATION.

The focus of this presentation will be based on the PARK ACHIEVEMENT SEMINAR. For three years I was Director of Counseling Placement and Academic Support Services at Park College in Kansas City, Missouri. Though I am no longer at Park, the Park Achievement Seminar has continued, and in my estimation remains to be significantly effective.

In starting to write about the Park Achievement Seminar or (PAS) as we later called it, it was impossible to keep from thinking about what preceded and how it developed. What actually happened was an evolutionary process that took place over a two year time span. I don't want to spend too much time on background information, but I think some of it might be important.

The development of academic support programs at Park started when I first arrived there in 1967. It was a pretty good situation because the college did not have an established Counseling Office and my role was relatively undefined. In setting up the counseling program I was expecting to work primarily with students having emotional or adjustment problems, but that didn't happen. Most of the students that came to the Counseling Center came because of academic trouble. Some of these students were having difficulty with one or two subjects, but many were in pretty bad shape--what I would call academically critical students, on the verge of failing

out of college.

I became extremely interested in these students because I knew many of them personally and they were destroying the image I had that only "dumb" students fail. This is somewhat supported by a study that was done by James Orchard indicating that approximately 380,000 to 400,000 students fail out of college each year and often for reasons other than the lack of ability.

I became involved with these students and I wanted to do domething for them. Park was a fairly small school, and I knew from my contact that many of these students were very bright but unable to produce satisfactory academic work.

I was able to convince the Dean that we should do something to help these students so we decided to provide a series of seminars on HOW TO STUDY. Our program on Study Skills started off with 27 students the first night. The next session we were down to 5 and the third night only one came. We still had 5 sessions to go.

As I look back on what happened, I believe that the idea was not as bad as the way we approached it. I also believe that by our failure at this first attempt, we learned a couple of very important lessons. First, it was impossible for us to stimulate students to significantly change their behavior simply by talking about what should be done. Second, the problems these students had were very complex. Even though the symptoms were similar, the causes were very diverse.

After this experience we backed off and started to think about what happened. We visited other colleges that had working programs, read articles and gave a great deal of thought as to what we should do next. After several months of study we prepared a proposal for a 1 credit course called ATTITUDE AND THE LEARNING PROCESS.

The rational for this course was based on our beliefs that a student's inter-personal relationship, with himself and with the elements of an institution, could directly effect his chance for success. With this in mind, the course was developed around five basic hypotheses. First, there is a direct relationship between a students attitude and his academic performance. Second, learning is facilitated when it is organized, planned and directed in a systemtized, orderly manner. Third, entering students have many misconceptions about environment and atmosphere. Constructive help can produce acceptance or more realistic conditions. Fourth, goal directed activities are usually more effective than non-goal directed activities. Fifth, self-understanding is important to sensitive human inter-action.

The shift from the emergency counseling sessions on study skills to a course on Attitude and the Learning Process was a big step in a positive direction.

We were now getting into some of the real psychodynamics of under-achievement. We were concerned about the student's self-concept, alternatives to college and ways to select and achieve these alternatives. We explored the area of vocational and educational decisions and when the need was expressed by the students in a group we talked about and worked on various methods to improve study skills. The approach that we used was to try and diminish threat, to encourage group inter-action and try to achieve a very informal and unstructured atmosphere. Emphasis was placed on developing sort of a group responsibility for what happened.

I think that it is important to note that at no time did we have to contend with "flack" from the regular faculty or "foot-dragging" on the part of the Administration. As I look back, I think that we can contribute that to a couple of factors. At the very start we carefully pointed out to the

President, the Dean, and the Business Manager the cost of recruiting a single student (something like $375 to $425). We also pointed out what the college lost each year in tuition, room income and other forms of revenue for the students that were suspended. This figure was astronomical. For instance, if your tuition is $1000 a semester and you suspend 20 students at the end of their freshman year,you lose $120,000 on those students alone. Another thing we did was to involve key faculty members. We also kept the total faculty aware of what we were doing - this included our failures as well as our successes. In other words we tried to operate above board at all times.

The Course Attitude and the Learning Process was in operation, independent of other academic support programs for three semesters.

The results of those three semesters is illustrated by Table I. While students were participating in the course there was a considerable gain, however, when they went back entirely on their own there was a regression. There were a few students who went on to achieve very well, but the number wasn't significant.

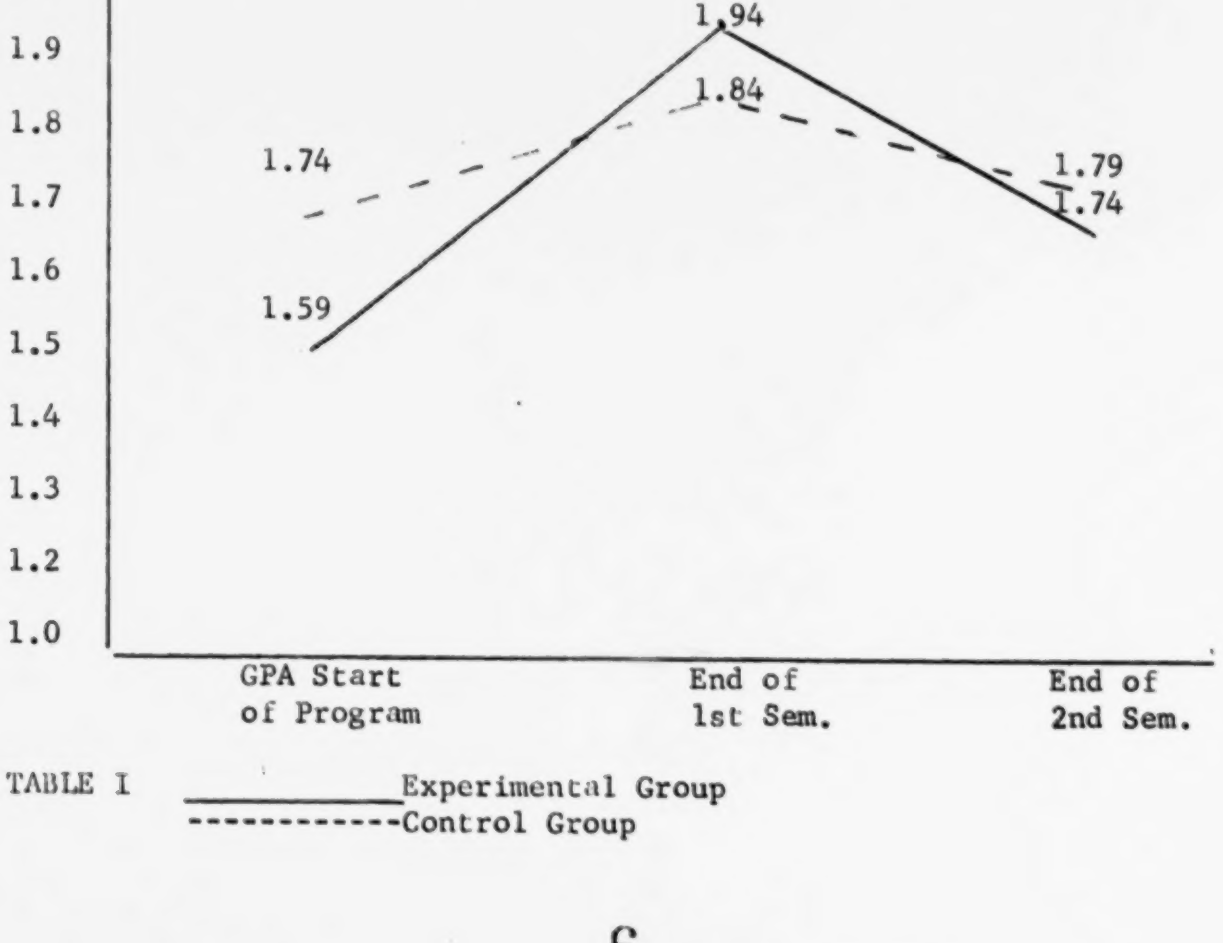


TABLE I _____Experimental Group
----------Control Group

The summer of 1969, the Dean of Park had negotiated with the Educational Developmental Center of Berea, Ohio for a summer EDC Program. Students from Park and other area colleges who had failed out of college but who wanted to re-enter would attend this program.

We had been interested in the Educational Development Center and the work that Dr. Robert Pitcher was doing for some time. Some of you are probably familiar with his program in Ohio. It specializes in re-tooling the student that has failed-out of college. Over the past 6-7 years Dr. Pitcher and his staff has been successful with approximatly 70% of the students they have worked with, which is a pretty good batting average.

The summer program at Park was a copy of the EDC program in Berea. Dr. Pitcher worked with us in selecting and training staff, organizing the curriculum and in preparing materials.

27 students enrolled in the summer EDC program at Park from 13 area colleges.

Halfway through the summer we started working on the possibility of modifying the EDC program to fit our Fall schedule. We knew that the program had a history of success in Ohio, we could see similar results taking place with the students we were working with. What we wanted to do was to use parts of the EDC program, including its philosophy and work completion policy, and apply this to students who are in college who are experiencing academic trouble or who may be admitted as a HIGH RISK. This program would be offered as a supplement to the course Attitude and Learning Process. Even though it was sort of hectic trying to hire and train a staff for the Fall semester and to change the EDC program elements to fit the traditional semester calendar, we felt we had something worth the effort. The result was the inception of the Park Achievement Seminar for the Fall of 1969.

The PAS program was a modification of the Educational Development Center and was for High Risk students. Emphasis, like the EDC, was placed on the development of basic skills in reading, writing, speaking, listening and critical thinking.

Once a student was identified for the program he went through an extensive educational diagnosis. This consisted of a Personal Interview, completion of a battery of tests and a review of past academic history.

The purpose of the educational diagnosis was to isolate academic weaknesses such as in the area of vocabulary, grammer, spelling, reading, etc. A second purpose was to look at psychological and motivational factors that may have handicapped the students.

After the educational diagnosis, a program was selected around the individual needs of each student. Such things as Vocabulary Development, Spelling, Writing Skills, Reading, English Grammer, Listening and Study Skills and Verbal Fluency could have been included in his program.

In addition to the 6 hours of elective credit earned in the PAS program, each student could enroll in 6 additional hours from the regular college curriculum.

As soon as the student's program was assigned, a weekly time schedule was prepared showing the elements that they would be participating in and the times they would meet. After receiving this schedule the students registered for other classes.

A very significant aspect of the PAS program was the philosophy under which it operated. This philosophy centered around decisions made by a student on a daily basis either to do or not to do assigned work.

The purpose of this work completion philosophy was to create an environment where the student could be assisted in developing sound habits of completing assignments on time.

If the student chooses not to do an assignment, this is accepted as a valid choice and is respected by the staff. A choice not to do the work is a choice to withdraw from the program and a student would be permitted to make this choice.

At first students thought this was a pretty cold policy and would say things like "You mean you would kick me out if I don't get my work in on time" and we would say "No, we wouldn't kick you out, we would honor your request to withdraw from the program". It was important that the philosophy be consistent throughout the program. Wherever a student would turn, he would come up against the same consistent structure. Very often these were capable students but virtual non-producers.

Another aspect of the programs philosophy was to place more emphasis on getting work done than on the quality of the work. Even though an instructor could return poor work to the student, it was rarely done.

Instead of grading papers they were evaluated on an individual basis. The student was more responsible for policing the quality of his work than was his instructor. We wanted the instructor to be a facilitator rather than grader. When work was evaluated it was on a positive rather than negative basis. We even took away the instructors' red pencils.

We were trying, through the academic skill areas, as well as through the Group Counseling program to re-construct the students self-concept. We wanted him to feel good about himself and his ability to establish and achieve realistic goals. Telling a person everything they do wrong usually doesn't accomplish this.

37 students were enrolled in the PAS program the Fall of 1969. All of these students were from the bottom half of their high school class. 24 were from the bottom quarter which was below the normal admissions requirement for the institution.

We considered all of these risk students with more than half being extremely high risk. Normally we could expect some of these students to be successful, but most would, by all probability encounter severe academic difficulty.

The following tables indicate the results of the PAS program.

Park Achievement Seminar
Grade Report

| Grade Range | No. of Students |
|---|---|
| 3.0 - 3.5 | 7 |
| 2.5 - 2.99 | 10 |
| 2.0 - 2.49 | 17 |
| 1.5 - 1.99 | 3 |
| 1.0 - 1.49 | 0 |
| Total | 37 |

Ave. GPA/4.0 = 2.261

TABLE II

Discussion of TABLE II:

At the conclusion of the Fall Semester the average GPA of the students participating on PAS was 2.261. This was equal to the averaged Grade Points of the entire freshman class. It was unlikely that this grade achievement made by high risk students would have been made without the help of the PAS program.

Thirty seven high risk students completed the PAS program during the 1969-70 Fall Semester. At the end of the first semester three students had below a 2.0 and were placed on probation. The table below represents the thirty students that marticulated the Spring Semester.

| Grade Range | No. of Students |
|---|---|
| 3.5 - 4.0 | 2 |
| 3.0 - 3.49 | 4 |
| 2.5 - 2.99 | 8 |
| 2.0 - 2.49 | 10 |
| 1.5 - 1.99 | 5 |
| 1.0 - 1.49 | 1 |
| 0.0 - .99 | 0 |
| | Total N = 30 |
| Ave. GPA/4.0 = 2.16 | |

TABLE III

Conclusion

The Park Achievement Seminar is still in operation at Park College. Current reports from the college indicate that early program results are being sustained. A three year follow-up study is currently being made.